



Rib Muscle Strain (Intercostal Muscle Strain)



Overview

This is an overstretching or tearing of one of the muscles between your ribs. We call these the "intercostal" muscles. You use them when you breathe. They expand and contract the chest cavity as you inhale and exhale. If you strain one, it may hurt to breathe.

Causes

How do you strain a rib muscle? It can happen if you get hit forcefully in the ribs. It can result from you twisting your torso farther than you should. A road accident, fall or sports injury can cause this. It can also happen if you stress your torso over and over again. Things like painting a ceiling, rowing and pitching a baseball can all cause it.

Symptoms

What are the symptoms? If your strain happens suddenly, you may feel intense pain. If your strain happens over time, you'll feel a minor pain that gradually gets worse. Your torso may feel stiff. You may be unable to take a deep breath. And, you can have tenderness, swelling and bruising.

Treatment

How do we treat it? Your strain will heal with time. Avoid activities that stress your rib muscles. Heating pads and cold compresses may help with pain and healing. Medications can help you feel better. Breathing and stretching exercises may help, too. Your doctor will create a care plan that's right for you.

